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WHOLE NO. 190.

SLINGS AND ARROWS

By HUGH CONWAY.

Author of "Called Back," "Dark Days," "A Family Affair," Etc.

CHAPTER IV.—Continued.

We drove straight from the church to the railway station. When alone in the carriage almost the first word my wife said was: "Julian Eustace was in church. Did you see him?"

"Yes, I saw him."

"Way did he not come and wish me good bye? It was not like him. I must have offended him. I will write and ask him how."

I hated the idea of Eustace Grant being, in such a moment as this, apparent in my wife's thoughts. "Never mind, dear," I said. "What is Eustace Grant to us?"

"Oh, much, very much to me, Julian! He was my mother's friend, he has been my one friend ever since I can remember."

"I do not like him," I said.

"But you will like him; you must like him. He is so good, so noble, so clever. Promise me, Julian, you will like him for me."

Although I would not credit him with the two first qualifications—goodness and nobility—I was willing to believe that Eustace Grant was clever—perhaps too clever. The disquieting fact was that he had been upon that night when I was for the time, in his eyes, an imposter, rambled in my mind. But to-day I could afford to be generous. I drew Viola close to me.

"Dearest," I said, "I will try and get rid of my prejudice. I will try and forget that this man loved you, and would have made you his wife. I will try to cease from wondering why, when he is so good, noble and clever, you should have chosen me."

Viola laid her soft cheek against mine. "Julian, my husband," she whispered, "are you not all that Eustace Grant is—and more?"

I loved you. With her words all my doubts, all my fear of Eustace Grant fled—never, I hoped, to return. With Viola's arms round me, her kisses on my lips, I could afford to pity my unsuccessful rival. When we were installed in the compartment of the train which was, by a royal arrangement of the guards, reserved to ourselves, I felt to considering how I should best make known to Viola that she was the woman which she had hitherto known me to be, I was beginning, or fancied I was beginning, to know something of my wife's true nature; and I told myself that the task before me was not an easy one. I had assigned it would be. My confusion was hurried on by a question she herself asked me:

"Julian, what name was it you signed in the book at church?"

I had hoped that in the agitation natural to a bride who signs her maiden name for the last time she had not noticed my autograph. But she must have done so, although she had said nothing about it until now.

So I made the plunge and told her all. Told her my true name, told her of the beautiful home in the west which would be ours; told her of the life, free from care and anxiety as to the future, which stretched before us. Then I besought her forgiveness for keeping her in ignorance of these things. I had, he said, given her to understand that I was a man with an income just enough to live upon in comfort.

Grant was right. He knew Viola when he told me that, by revealing my deception, he might destroy the fairest of happiness. She said little, but her look told me she was hurt and wounded. I verily believe her first thoughts were that she would rather, than have the power of sharing such a home and so much wealth with her. How little man understands women! Perhaps because no two women are alike.

But Viola forgave me. A woman always forgives the man she loves, but I knew that she was sad at the thought that I could have dreamed that riches might have influenced her. Nevertheless, it was days before I could get her to join the unreluctant in the schemes which I wove of our future life.

We went down to a quiet watering place on the south coast where we waited for a fortnight. Oh, those sweet summer days! Shall I ever forget them? For the time there seemed no cloud which could possibly shade our joy. All the cynical, suspicious, misanthropical elements seemed swept out of my nature. I told myself that the constant society of the wife I loved was making a better as well as a happier man of me.

At the end of our stay by the sea it was our intention to return to London for a couple of days, and then start for Switzerland. Here, or in what country we chose, we were to spend months. In fact, I had as yet no home to offer my wife. The tenant of Heral Abbey would not turn out without six months' notice; so, for the time, we must be wanderers.

Eustace Grant—I had by now almost forgotten him—wrote once to my wife. She seemed overjoyed at the news of his writing, but vexed at the ceremonial way in which his letter began. It lies before me now. I copy it:

"My DEAR MRS. LORRAINE: You will remember that next Tuesday is your twenty-first birthday."

"As I am going abroad very shortly, I am anxious to submit the accounts of the trust to you and, of course, Mr. Grant. I hear that you will be in town on Tuesday. Can I call upon you anywhere, or would it be more convenient for us to meet at my solicitor's—Mr. Monk, 38 Lincoln's Inn Fields? Please let me know. Yours sincerely, 'EUSTACE GRANT.'"

"He might have sent a word of congratulation," said Viola, in a vexed tone. "How shall I answer this, Julian?"

"Say we will meet him at Mr. Monk's at 12 o'clock on Tuesday."

To which effect Viola wrote. I did not read the letter, but I wondered at the length of it.

CHAPTER V.

"THAT IT SHOULD COME TO THIS."

We reached town on the Monday night and slept at an hotel. Thursday morning we were to start for the continent. Besides the interview with Eustace Grant, there were many business matters to which I was bound to attend. I had to see my solicitor, and give him instructions about the settlement which I had to make on Viola. I had also to make my will, a matter which until now I had neglected; so that the Tuesday and Wednesday promised to be fully occupied. Viola also wished to pay a visit to her old friend, Miss Rosier. The prim spinster would never forgive her

if she passed through town without calling. She did not press me to accompany her. Perhaps, in the present changed and unexpected state of affairs, she had much to say to her old friend which could not well be said in my presence.

So I suggested she should go alone to her old home, spend an hour with her friend and meet me at Mr. Monk's at 12 o'clock. In the meantime I would go to my own solicitor's and arrange my business, the purpose of which I did not make known to my wife. I hired a private brougham for her, placed her in it and stood at the window saying adieu. It was the first time since our marriage that we had been parted for an hour. It was, moreover, her twenty-first birthday, and on her hand was a ring which I had just given her—a ring the value of which had startled her, for she had not yet realized what it was to be a rich man's wife.

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